

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) along with 11 other moderate Republican members of Congress sent a letter to President Bush yesterday urging him to maintain the current law and regulations governing family planning services. The letter is in response to third-party efforts pressuring the Administration to reinstate a 1980s gag rule. Such a rule would severely restrict access to family planning healthcare services for millions of low-income Americans.

On May 6, 2008, nearly 80 organizations sent a letter to President Bush requesting him to re-impose a domestic gag rule, similar to a 1980s rule. The rule would prevent physicians from providing complete and accurate advice to patients and would restrict funding to hundreds of Title X providers around the country.

“The Title X family planning program is one of our nation’s most critical healthcare services,” said Kirk, a member of the House Appropriations Committee. “The vast majority of patients are far below the poverty level and see no other physician. The Title X family planning program is strongly supported by the American Medical Association, American Hospital Association and American Nurses Association. A domestic gag rule make changes to this well-established and important program, forcing doctors to make a troubling choice - either forego federal funding and cut vitally important healthcare for millions of Americans, or accept funding and agree to withhold full and unbiased medical information from their patients. Doctors, nurses and hospitals should not have to make that choice.”

The federal Title X program was established in 1970, with strong support of then-Congressman George Bush (R-TX), and serves as the only domestic federal program dedicated solely to family planning and other preventative healthcare services. Title X provides \$300 million annually for comprehensive healthcare, including screening and counseling for HIV, breast and cervical cancer, sexually transmitted infections, high blood pressure and anemia.

“By statute, Title X dollars may not be used for abortion and the current regulations impose strict separation requirements to protect this law,” the lawmakers wrote. “Any change to these well-established regulations governing the provision of healthcare services to millions of men, women and children are largely unnecessary and may block critical healthcare coverage for many Americans.”

According to an Administrative directive, all new rules to be proposed during the current Administration must be released by June 1, 2008. The Kirk letter is below.

May 21, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush, President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As Members of Congress who support broad access to women's healthcare, we are writing to ask that you maintain the current, well-established regulations that govern funding for the Title X family planning program.

We read with interest in a recent Hill article that a number of advocacy organizations have urged you to modify Title X regulations (May 7, 2008). Changing the long-upheld regulations in a way that would restrict access to basic healthcare would be detrimental for many Americans. We ask that you stand by the current regulations and the 86 percent of Americans who support federal funding of comprehensive women's healthcare.

As you know, the Title X program was created in 1970 with broad bipartisan support, including Congressman George H. Bush. The program has operated successfully under the current regulation for nearly four decades, serving millions of Americans with complete, accurate, and unbiased information from their physicians. Title X funding also provides screening and treatment of a wide range of diseases, including breast and cervical cancer, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, high blood pressure and anemia. The vast majority of women receiving these services are at or below 150 percent of the poverty level, and many of them see no other healthcare provider.

By statute, Title X dollars may not be used for abortion services, and the current regulations impose strict reporting and separation requirements to protect the integrity of the program. Any change to these well-established regulations governing the provision of healthcare services to millions of men, women and children are largely unnecessary and may block critical healthcare coverage for many Americans.

We ask you to stand by the current regulations and restrictions governing the Title X program so that its healthcare providers – located in every single state and U.S. territory – can continue to serve their patients.

Sincerely,